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RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA PRIORITY 0241
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 6841
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001461

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: BRITISH AND SRI LANKAN LEADERS DISCUSS POSSIBLE
BRITISH CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE PROCESS

REF: COLOMBO 1457

Classified By: CDA JAMES MOORE FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) British High Commissioner in Colombo Dominick Chilcott briefed Co-Chair representatives September 6 on President Rajapaksa's August 31 meeting with Prime Minister Blair near London. The origin of the meeting, Chilcott explained, was a mutual recognition that the UK's experience in peacemaking and conflict resolution in Northern Ireland could be relevant to finding a settlement to Sri Lanka's protracted civil conflict. The meeting, announced on short notice, was intended to explore the British experience in Northern Ireland, establish a dialogue between the UK experts and Sri Lankans, and identify concrete possible outcomes. Chilcott emphasized that the initiative was not intended to usurp the Co-Chair mechanism, that any actions undertaken would be complementary to the Co-Chairs' work, and that Co-Chairs would be kept apprised of developments.

Drawing on the Northern Ireland Experience

12. (C) The first 40 minutes of the one-hour meeting were devoted to a tete-a-tete between Prime Minister Blair and President Rajapaksa, which ran significantly longer than anticipated. Chilcott acknowledged that neither side appears to have been fully briefed on the one-on-one meeting. Chilcott understood, however, that this session was largely given over to Rajapaksa's account of the current situation in Sri Lanka. During the remaining 20 minutes, when the delegations joined the principals, the discussion concentrated on the dynamics of the Northern Ireland peace process. The British delegation emphasized that in their experience results were obtained only when the focus moved from which party to the conflict was "right" or "wrong" to the more important question of "do you support peace?"

13. (C) Rajapaksa asked the British government to select

persons knowledgeable about the Northern Ireland peace process who would be invited to Sri Lanka to meet with parties to the conflict. Chilcott said that possible candidates have not yet been identified, but added that he hoped the first visit could take place within the next month. In addition, the UK offered to share with Sri Lanka its experience in the devolution of power. The Sri Lankan side welcomed this proposal and noted this could be a useful input into the ongoing all parties conference in Sri Lanka, which has met periodically in recent months to consider avenues to a possible settlement. (Note: To date, the meetings of the all parties conference have produced no concrete results. End note.)

A Possible Role for Both the US and India

14. (C) Prime Minister Blair discussed the important contribution made to the Northern Ireland peace process by prominent US mediators, such as former Senator Mitchell and former President Clinton, and linked the active US role to the political influence wielded by the Irish-American community in the US. Blair suggested that India, with its large Tamil population and stature as a regional power, might make a similar contribution to the search for peace settlement in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan delegation did not contest this suggestion.

5.(C) While the outside experts in the proposed initiative, should it move forward, would be primarily from the UK, Chilcott expressed to Charge interest in including Americans with experience in the Northern

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Ireland peace process.

Comment

16. (C) Comment: Given the bleak assessment, following five weeks of heavy fighting between Sri Lankan forces and the LTTE in the north and east, of prospects for a way forward to negotiations, a new approach and fresh ideas are welcome. While it is conceivable that the successful conclusion earlier this week of the government push to take Sampur (reftel) may conceivably provide a new dynamic and give both parties reason to return to negotiations, we think the British proposal, including the expression of interest in a US component, deserves serious consideration, possibly at the Co-Chairs September 12 meeting in Brussels. Sri Lanka lacks the framework for a solution that would give negotiations a real chance of success. This proposal could help to create such a framework. A Co-Chairs meeting scheduled for September 7 with Foreign Minister Samaraweera should provide an opportunity to get a read-out from the Government of Sri Lanka on the Blair-Rajapaksa meeting and this possible initiative. End comment.
MOORE